INTRODUCTION

"A good acting play that is not also good enough to be enjoyed in the study is not worth a dying tinker's dream"

- O'Casey in The Flying Wasp

Since the demise of Sean O'Casey in 1964, there has been appreciable activity in the literary world and the critical circle for a proper evaluation of his works.

O'Casey himself has left behind a considerable volume of work, plenty of correspondence and interviews for a critical assessment of his "Dublin Trilogy."

Although quite a lot has been written on The Silver Tassie and the needless hue and cry that followed created by O'Casey himself and the Abbey Theatre as represented by W.B. Yeats, the literary fall out of the Dublin Trilogy as they were performed has been rather limited. The quality of criticism has been more in the nature of reviews of the plays as they were performed seen from a particular point of time and ideology, and as they are available now, they are mostly in the nature of how different and daring O'Casey was from his predecessors, and their relevance to the Abbey Theatre Histories.

Since 1974, a journal has exclusively devoted itself to
O'Casey study, and O'Casey Annuals are brought out from 1982. The wealth of articles is difficult to survey even for the specialist. A majority of criticism suffers from a certain possessiveness of O'Casey and a blind admiration of his works, sometimes going to the extent of making far out comparisons to Shakespeare and the historical cycle of his plays; or, calling one of his plays a tenement 'Macbeth'. Much of the early criticism is condescending in nature. Being a new comer to the Abbey Theatre echelon of playwrights, and belonging to a different class in society, probably, O'Casey did not have, or did not wish to exhibit, the courage to challenge the views expressed for fear of antagonizing the powers that be. Once he was established, he demonstrated the courage to hit back, as he did during The Silver Tassie tempest.

There are studies that have been made from the Marxist point of view to show that the plays project a class struggle. Studies have been made, rather labouredly about the psychological insights of O'Casey.

Unfortunately, it is not borne in mind that the plays were written by a man who was then around forty and who was anxious to get his play plays produced, and who was honest and passionate about play wrighting. He had little opportunities
to learn from schools, or by watching all the plays being performed there and his sources of inspiration were Shakespeare and Boucicault, besides the Bible.

O'Casey was endowed with tremendous powers of observation and he had utilized this rare talent in writing his plays. He knew his country's history, folklore and mythology and this helped him quite a great deal in writing the plays, the way he had done them. A good deal of criticism sounds pompous by labelling and pigeon-holing the plays into various genres—naturalism, realism, expressionism, tragi-comedy, satire, etc., as though the plays would communicate more and better after such critical baptism.

It is to be remembered that each of O'Casey plays is a highly individual work. It has its own entity and an inner organic structure and nature. O'Casey kept on experimenting with new forms, and he never really applied the success formulae of one play into another. It was for him a voyage in playwrighting, discovering new, powerful modes of communication. Most of the criticism, no matter how brilliant or how ingenious, misses the basic point of his plays and their specific characteristics, generalizing as it does to a
point where it is either unwarranted, or plainly untenable.

It is in this context that the present study is sought to be justified. The three plays, viz., The Shadow of a Gunman, Juno and the Paycock and The Plough and the Stars (now referred to as the Dublin Trilogy) are analysed critically from a point of view of a theatre producer/director; in other words, as pieces written primarily for production.

Each play is interpreted individually, act by act, and sequence by sequence. In a play a sequence is a point in time and space between two nodal points of an entry and an exit of a character or characters. What happens to a character/characters physically, mentally and morally is examined vis-a-vis each other and the earlier sequence. The present study will try to bring into focus the Aural and Visual patterns in each play and also emphasize the meaningful silences and pauses wherever they are indicated by the playwright as taking place after the exit of a character and before the entry of another; or as the characters are on the stage. The action takes place on multiple levels. In fine, this study will bring to light the strong Aural and Visual sense of Sean O’Casey.

This interpretative method does not follow a single
rigid pattern, as such a pattern, is unsuitable since the playwright himself has written the three plays in three different moulds. Besides, Sean O’Casey’s plays are too complex to be crushed and packed into uniform patterns.

It is possible that some motifs may keep recurring either directly or subtly in more than one play. They are indicated wherever they are present.

Though the three plays are generally prescribed in the Indian Universities for study, no major attempt has been made to produce them in India, despite their academic popularity. Only in the early sixties, did some enterprising group in Bombay attempt a production of *Juno and the Paycock*. After that, to the best of knowledge of this student, no production has been done.

Cowasjee has done an extensive study of O’Casey’s works. He reveals a passion for the man and his works. He had met him and an interview with him finds a place in the O’Casey journals.

This is one of the first specific studies by an Indian on O’Casey and probably the first anywhere to focus on the Aural and Visual Elements in the trilogy.